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AMERICAN PILOTS REPORTED FLYING IN LIBYAN FORCES

EX-C.I.A. AGENT RECRUITING

Mechanics, as Well as Fliers
From Canada and Britain,
Paid by U. S. Fugitive

This article is based on reporting by Jeff Gerth and Philip Taubman and was written by Mr. Gerth.

Special to The New York Times

LONDON, Oct. 21 — American pilots and aircraft mechanics, including military veterans, are flying and maintaining Libyan Air Force planes in an operation organized by Edwin P. Wilson, a former American intelligence agent, according to associates of Mr. Wilson.

The American flight personnel, as well as pilots from Canada and Britain, have been recruited and paid by companies controlled by Mr. Wilson and, at least since last year, have flown a Libyan fleet of American-made cargo and transport aircraft and helicopters, the associates said.

One Western pilot recruited by Mr. Wilson said that American pilots flew helicopters in support of the Libyan invasion of Chad this year, but the extent to which Western recruits are involved directly in Libyan combat missions could not be determined. The pilot said he was paid about \$3,000 a month.

Coordination in London

Some of the American pilots and mechanics have been recruited in the United States by other Americans. Most of the operation is coordinated through a London office that represents several African and European companies controlled by Mr. Wilson, according to his associates.

Dozens of pilots and mechanics have participated in the operation for Libya, a militant Arab nation in North Africa, although the precise number could not be determined. Their role apparently violates no United States law.

Earlier this week, an American aircraft mechanic, Richard L. Love, visited the London office, waiting for a visa

and airplane connections to Libya. Mr. Love told a former Wilson associate that he had been recruited in Alabama and had signed a one-year contract to service Libyan military aircraft, according to the former associate.

Recruits Held Well Paid

Mr. Love said he and the other recruits were well paid for their services but was not specific, the associate added.

Mr. Wilson, a former covert agent for the Central Intelligence Agency, now lives in Libya, where he is a fugitive from a Federal indictment last year that charged him with illegally shipping explosives to Libya to help train terrorists.

Mr. Wilson did not return a telephone call placed today to his office in Tripoli. A reporter left a message with an associate of Mr. Wilson seeking a reply to questions about the pilot recruitment program.

The unofficial involvement of Americans in Libyan military activity contrasts sharply with United States foreign policy toward the Arab nation, led by Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. Recent Administrations have regarded Libya, a supporter of international terrorism, as an increasingly disruptive force in the Middle East.

Last summer, the United States reported that two Navy jets had shot down two Libyan fighter planes after being fired on by one of them.

After the assassination of President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt this month and amid reports of hostile Libyan activity against the Sudan, the Reagan Administration sent two Awacs radar surveillance planes to Egypt to monitor Libyan aircraft activity in the area.

American officials said the presence of American pilots and mechanics in Libya helped explain what until now had been a mystery to them: who was maintaining the American planes that were sold to Libya years ago, when that country's relationship with the United States was not belligerent. Past speculation had centered on North Koreans and others from Communist countries.

A White House spokesman had no immediate comment today on whether high-level Reagan Administration officials were aware that Americans were flying and maintaining planes for the Libyan Air Force, although law enforcement officials knew of the recruitment operation.

The involvement of the Americans in Libya does not appear to violate American law, according to Justice Department officials.

E. Lawrence Barcella Jr., Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, is overseeing the Federal investigation of Mr. Wilson. He said the neutrality laws, which prohibit Americans from enlisting in the military service of a foreign nation, apparently do not

private business activities in 1976 and 1977, his help in training terrorists in Libya by shipping explosives and his hiring of former Army Special Forces troops for the training operation.

The recruitment of former military aircraft personnel illustrates for American law enforcement officials some of the same issues posed by Mr. Wilson's earlier activities, especially the lack of laws governing the private business activities of former American servicemen and intelligence agents. It also demonstrates Mr. Wilson's capacity to continue to operate within the United States even though he has been out of the country for several years.

House Panel Seeks Remedies

The House Select Committee on Intelligence is considering possible legislative remedies as part of its investigation into Mr. Wilson's activities.

In 1976, shortly after ending his employment with the Office of Naval Intelligence, which he had joined after leaving the C.I.A., Mr. Wilson closed a business deal with Colonel Qaddafi to sell his expertise in intelligence, arms and explosives to Libya for the training of terrorists.

A few years later, after Federal investigators began examining his activities in the United States, Mr. Wilson shifted his base of business operations from Washington to Europe and Libya. About the same time, several companies controlled by Mr. Wilson began using the London office of Brilhurst Ltd., a British company, according to associates of Mr. Wilson and company documents.

Scope of Recruiting Program

The recruitment program, which started about two years ago, includes dozens of pilots, flight engineers and aircraft mechanics from the United States, Britain and Canada with both civilian and military backgrounds, according to associates of Mr. Wilson familiar with the plan. Among those recruited were British paratroopers.

According to spokesmen for American aircraft companies, the Libyan Air Force has eight C-130's, 20 CH-47 helicopters, known as Chinooks, 10 727's, nine C-47's and one 707.

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